



# Children's Workforce Strategy

Swindon Children's Services

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# Foreword

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**Corporate Director of Children Services**

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I am really excited to present our refreshed Workforce Strategy which sets out how we will continue to attract, recruit, develop, retain, support, and engage with all our employees. It has a clear intention to outline key principles and the continued practice we need to deliver to ensure we create the very best working conditions where good practice can thrive.

It has become increasingly tough to recruit good dedicated staff in Children Services, at a time of national increases in Children coming into care and Safeguarding activity, it is now more than ever that our children deserve the very best staff to support them. In our first Ofsted Monitoring visit after the inspection our staff said they are beginning to see the positive impact of the changes we are making – this means a lot to me and the senior leadership team as we continue to drive forward a culture of partnership and collaboration- both as a whole service, with our partners and most importantly our children and young people who remain at the very heart of all we do.

We have made some excellent progress since July 2023 now is a good time to come and join us and to continue to stay with us on the journey if you are already here. This strategy forms part of our commitment to our staff to ensure we continue to excel and that we as an organisation work to ensure you all enjoy safe and rewarding careers while making a true difference to those who most need us.

It is an absolute privilege to lead Children Services here at Swindon borough Council, I am surrounded by fantastic people every day committed to ensuring they do the very best they can do to support and protect all children and young people in our borough. Whether that be as Social workers, Family support and intervention workers or in our Education and SEND services, I am truly grateful for all they do. My colleagues are innovative, child focused, resilient and hardworking and they could work anywhere but they choose to stay with me here in Swindon. I thank you wholeheartedly for this. We welcome people from all backgrounds, with a range of differing skills and experience, from all disciplines and specialisms, working alongside each other to achieve positive outcomes for Children

# Introduction

At Swindon Borough Council, we believe that children, young people and families deserve the best support and care. We are committed to delivering the highest standard of practice for our most vulnerable children and families but this can only happen with a dedicated and stable workforce. In response to our inadequate Ofsted judgement in July 2023, we have established our two-year transformation plan that sets out our intention to create sustainable positive change for all.

**This can be viewed here: [Ofsted improvement plan | Swindon Borough Council](#)**

To make this a reality, we must focus on our workforce and this strategy outlines the ways in which we intend to do this. We strive to create a supportive and vibrant working environment with a culture where everyone feels valued and listened to, where we provide continued professional development (CPD) for staff and meaningful progression for those who choose to take it.

**The effectiveness of this strategy will be seen through several indicators including but not limited to:**

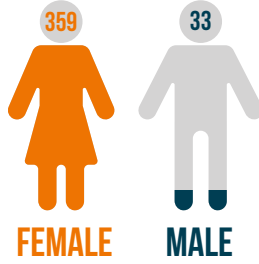
- Permanent staff in post
- Length of service of staff
- Internal promotions/progression
- Vacancy rates and time to hire
- Reduction of agency costs
- Positive employee engagement results
- Recruitment and attraction to all roles at all levels
- Learning and development opportunities and take-up rates

As part of this strategy, we will monitor the effectiveness of our actions at regular points reporting back to both our staff, corporate leadership team and improvement board. We will celebrate what works and continually iterate and development areas that do not deliver. The priorities in this strategy will cover 2024 – 2026 and will be reviewed as needed.

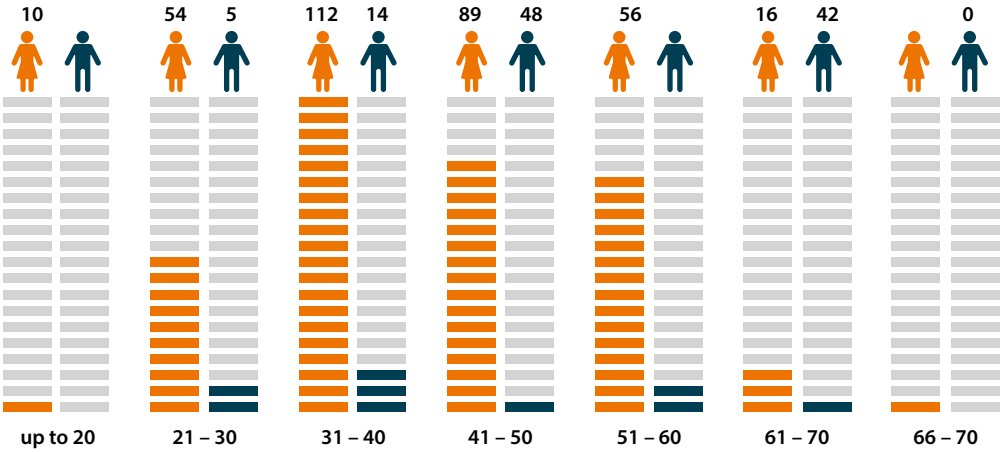
We provide many different services and therefore a range of career opportunities all providing vital support to our children and families. We will enable a shared language and common ways of working with a focus on quality training, development, and support both generic to all Children's Services staff and also more specialist training to help staff maintain their area of professional practice. Further work will follow on mapping career pathways throughout the service whether that be in social work, residential care through to essential support roles.

This strategy will consider key areas of the employee lifecycle and we will frequently gather feedback from staff to continuously refine our approach. We will identify gaps between current skills and future needs against demand for our services and ensure both corporate and political support to create the conditions for success.

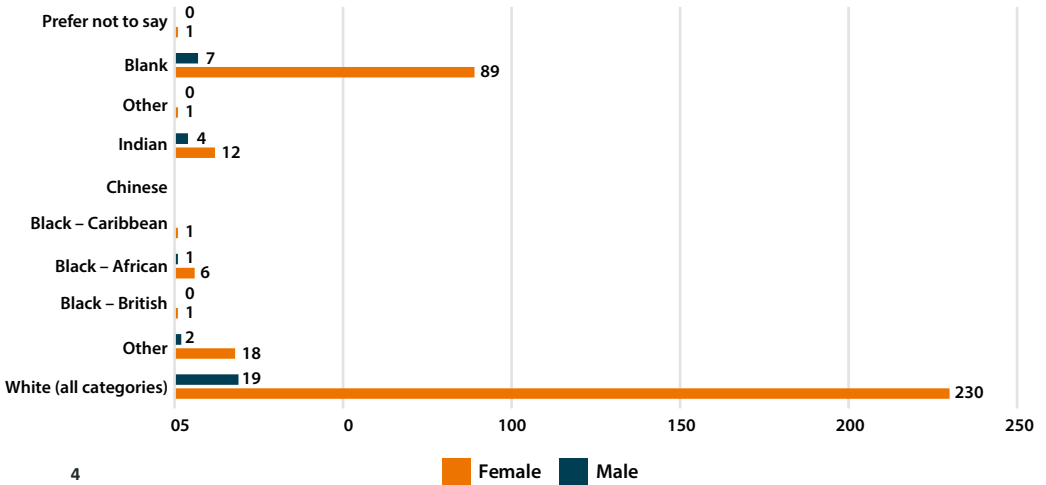
# EMPLOYEES BY SEX



## AGE PROFILE

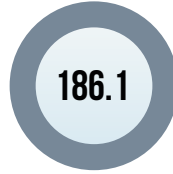


## ETHNICITY



**STAFF COUNT**

**STAFF FTE**



Education, Inclusion and Skills (does not include libraries as transferring)



Children and Families



Early Help and Intervention



**TOTAL**



# Ethos and Practice Framework

We value the importance of building meaningful relationships with children and families and supporting them to achieve positive change. The authority has a clear vision for transformation and improvement and is one of twenty three councils in the UK using the Family Safeguarding Model – a unique draw for professionals who are keen to practise in a different way.

The Family Safeguarding Model is a holistic approach to child protection that focuses on addressing the underlying issues within families to prevent future harm to children. It involves multidisciplinary teams of professionals, including social workers, mental health practitioners, substance abuse specialists, and domestic violence experts, working together to provide integrated support to families.

The model emphasizes early intervention, tailored support, and collaboration with families to address issues such as substance abuse, mental health problems, and domestic violence. By addressing these root causes, the model aims to improve family functioning, reduce the risk of harm to children, and promote long-term stability and well-being within families

**More can be seen on the model and how we use it at:**  
[About family safeguarding | Swindon Borough Council](#)



Below are the 6 key objectives that underpin all our work with children, young people and their families developed with staff as part of our improvement journey.

Safe Practice	Early Intervention	Direct Work	Workforce Development	Children we Look After	Impact and Outcomes
We work together with all our partners to ensure our most vulnerable children and young people are safe from harm	We will ensure that we will intervene at the earliest opportunity to effect positive change and offer timely and proportionate action to children's needs	We will ensure that our children, young people and families are supported to fully work with us	We will ensure that we have competent skilled and stable staff including sufficient numbers of foster carers, who reflect the diversity of our borough so children receive timely responses to have their needs met	All the Children we look after will be protected, educated, are healthy and are fully prepared into adulthood	We will all continue to build an environment where social work practice will thrive and ensure all children and Young People achieve good outcomes

Other approaches ensure we listen to and act upon the **Voice of the Child** to inform our decision making. We use these views to build effective restorative relationships with children and families focussing on solutions and improved outcomes.

# Attraction and Recruitment

There are national shortages across a number of roles that are central to the delivery of our services. Social workers, youth justice workers, domestic abuse and substance misuse specialists are professions where there are more posts than people available. Tough working environments, stress and high attrition rates alongside the attractive nature of agency working, all create challenges for local authorities. Given the importance of relationship consistency in creating positive outcomes for children and families, a key priority area has to be the attraction and recruitment of staff especially in social work posts.

## **We plan to do the following in order to maintain a predominantly permanent and stable workforce:**

- Review our end-to-end recruitment processes to ensure they are fit for purpose and provide the best possible candidate experience.
- Enhance our presence on sector specific recruitment websites and social media channels telling the story of Swindon and the benefits of working here.
- Further develop our employment brand and content with input from staff who will help us to create videos, be ambassadors and get involved with recruitment.
- Create a microsite where we can better tell the story of our improvement journey and showcase reasons to join us.
- Attend university open days to talk to those who are studying and to promote Swindon as a destination employer.
- Ensure we attract a strong cohort of ASYE's every year to grow into social work posts for the future from a variety of universities.
- Encourage more of our students on placement for social work to stay with us post placement into ASYE posts.
- Develop standard advert wording with the right tone of voice and content so that we are consistent wherever our messages appear.
- Consider how we reach out to those who left us and discuss a possible return where it is appropriate.
- Offer internal secondments and step up opportunities for our people so they remain with the service.
- Utilise the support of external suppliers where needed when direct recruitment is slow or fails to provide results.



Building permanency and resilience in statutory and non-statutory roles will ensure best outcomes for our staff.

All recruiting managers must be trained to ensure they use a fair, inclusive and consistent approach to selection with safer recruitment embedded to ensure children, young people and vulnerable adults are always safeguarded. Our vetting and referencing of all staff will be timely and accurate.

An 'always on' recruitment campaign will be rolled out for social work roles in particular while we address the reliance on agency worker usage and attempt to redirect finances back into the service for the benefit of all employees.

Attracting people to Childrens Service should go beyond the standard recruitment process with opportunities for people to get involved through volunteering, work placements and shadowing. We need to attend Careers Fairs, university campuses and deliver talks to education providers to promote the enjoyment and benefit of considering a role in our service. During the life of this strategy, we should consider engaging earlier with young people at college and in sixth form to ensure they are aware of all the opportunities potentially available to them within Children's Services.

We will also consider the role of Step Up and Front-Line programmes that could strengthen our pipeline of talent and reduce agency usage in social work roles.



# Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

Reading across from wider council policy, we are committed to ensure that our service is inclusive, diverse and treats all staff equally with respect and dignity at all times. We want an environment where individuals can be themselves.

## As part of this commitment, we will:

- Develop innovative ways to recruit the workforce.
- Invest in training and development to increase the representation of ethnicity in all job levels.
- Equip our line managers to manage a representative and diverse workforce.
- Provide timely and appropriate workplace adjustments for disabled employees.



# Early careers – Apprenticeships and ASYE's

Part of our workforce stability will come through the effective recruitment of apprentices and newly qualified staff. We also recognise that apprenticeships can be used to upskill current staff as well as support new hires.

Where we experience skills shortages, managers will be encouraged to explore the opportunities for the use of apprenticeships, recognising that these can be very diverse at any level of the organisation.

Managers are encouraged to view [www.instituteforapprenticeships.org](http://www.instituteforapprenticeships.org) for available standards.

We must focus on retaining our ASYE's and providing suitable opportunities for development. This starts with encouraging students of social work who have a placement with us to return post qualifying for our ASYE programme.

A new approach to how we train and rotate ASYE's across the service is being considered and will be refreshed as part of ongoing plans for the Academy which will broaden in remit to cover development for wider roles in the service.

# Onboarding and Induction

We know that first impressions count and that our induction process for new recruits starts before Day 1 with effective onboarding. Managers are encouraged to maintain contact with new starters prior to their start date to ease the transition into a new role and organisation. We need to get the process right for Day 1, Week 1 and Month 1 onwards.

This includes simple things like IT equipment and ID on their first day and where possible buddy systems should be set up to show people the ropes. Research shows that those in social care posts value the following elements in induction and we shall consider how we approach this at SBC.



All who are new to their role will receive a local induction specific to the area they work in which will be provided through their line manager. This will be designed to support new team members to understand and integrate into the team and environment, and to support them to develop the contacts, skills and knowledge to be effective in their role. All employees will also attend a Corporate Induction to help familiarise themselves with the council's vision, values, purpose and structure. The process of induction should be integrated as far as possible with the management of probationary procedures, supervision, appraisal and learning and development activities.

New starters will be encouraged to engage with the current Social Care Academy and other professional support frameworks for continuous professional development.

# Engagement, Appraisals and Supervision

It is vital that staff have a voice and can contribute to the way we do things. Most often our staff know the needs of their children and families best and can provide invaluable insight into how to improve services to improve lives.

There are a number of forums that staff can actively engage with and are encouraged to attend. Internal networking and groups play an essential part in engagement. We will also survey levels of engagement with both short pulse surveys throughout the year and wider staff engagement surveys alongside the annual Social Work Health check.

It is our policy to provide regular high-quality supervision which supports and motivates staff and encourages reflective practice. There is now extensive research that evidences effective reflective supervision supports practitioners in managing complex cases, decision making and becoming more autonomous in their role and underpins good practice in working with children, young people and families. Staff who case hold will receive case supervision also.

Effective appraisals enable us to ensure the learning and development programme responds to skills and knowledge gaps and emerging trends affecting the different professional areas. Appraisals are conducted on an annual basis alongside monthly supervision and 6-monthly check ins.

Supervisions and appraisals are designed to provide a consistent framework for developing and supporting employees to perform to their best and provide opportunity to review career aspirations and pathways, areas for development and to celebrate effective performance.



# Career Progression and Retention

Succession Planning identifies future talent, specialists and leaders and can be an important way to identify employees who have the current skills, or the potential to develop new skills, to move up in the service or on to other positions. Effective succession planning increases the availability of capable individuals who are ready to take on new posts as they become available thereby helping to reduce the risk associated with a loss of experienced leadership or loss of specialist skills/knowledge.

We intend to hold 6-monthly workshops to start to develop our succession process - to clarify what good skills and knowledge look like across a range of roles, identifying commonalities, and to identify individuals in the teams who could progress to the next level in the next 3, 6 and 12 months with the right support. This will also help to identify employees' qualifications and experience, career development paths between teams, and opportunities for apprenticeships and work experience for those looking to enter specific professions such as social work. It will also support the development of our learning and development programmes to build the right support and opportunities to equip staff with the necessary skills to reach the next level or develop a key specialism.

Children's Services will continue to review the latest national and local market data, feedback from staff and researching best practice, to enable us to trial new initiatives that will have a positive impact on specific workforce needs. The further use of alternatively qualified staff to support families before crisis intervention is needed could also be a strand for greater development to ease workforce pressures and sit alongside our practice model.

**The retention of skilled practitioners dedicated to providing exceptional services requires all of the following:**

- Engaging Leadership
- Promoting and embracing diversity and equality in all aspects of our practice
- Competitive compensation and benefits
- Effective training and development
- Supportive work culture
- Strong work-life balance
- Career progression opportunities
- Recognising and managing wellbeing initiative that support good mental health in staff

We are ambitious to cultivate a pipeline of talent that joins, grows and stays at SBC, with clear opportunities and scope for progression.

As part of this strategy, we will develop and implement the use of 'Stay Interviews' for staff in critical roles. This will involve a proactive approach to a one-on-one conversation between an employee and their manager to understand factors that contribute to the employees work satisfaction and motivation to stay with us. We will explore areas such as job fulfilment, career development opportunities, job challenges and suggestions for improvement. The goal is to address issues before they become attrition drivers for individuals.

## Turnover and Exit Interviews

We work hard to create the right values, conditions and development opportunities to retain our staff, however we recognise that at times employees will want to move onto different roles or places.

Turnover data provides us with a certain level of information about what is happening in different teams, but exit interviews are able to tell us more. Children's Services will consistently use intelligence from exit interviews when staff have left the Local Authority to influence what can be done to improve retention. This is achieved through discussions with staff around the level of support they have received and their opinions on what needs to be improved. This is then used to help influence our Workforce Strategy, so that we can ensure we have the right things in place to retain key staff.

## Looking to the Future and Moving Forward

In Children's Services we recognise that due to the world we work in, the needs of children, young people and families are always evolving and changing, and the workforce needs to change with it. That's why we know it is important to continuously review this strategy to ensure it is aligned to our needs and the services we deliver. It is not design to be a tick box exercise but a dynamic document that helps to support our workforce now and in the future. We will use these models, combined with the data and engagement approaches outlined in this document to help adapt our approaches to ensure that we have the right workforce to deliver our Children's Service vision.

## Annex 1 – Measures of success

We have ambitious plans and need to monitor our workforce outcomes and successes to ensure we meet our improvement plan. Below are some of the measures we intend to review.

Our Workforce - Today and Tomorrow...		
	2024	2029 target (where appropriate)
Total FTE	227 FTE	Total FTE
% Permanent Workforce	75%	=>85%
% Staff Turnover	15.3%	=< National Average
Wellbeing*	80.2%	90%
Gender Split	92% Female 8% Male	Aligned with national data
Management Gender Split	83% Female 17% Male	To reflect overall workforce
Equality, Diversity and Inclusion	Further data collection required	To reflect our borough
Average Case Loads per Social Worker	18.6	15
Positive Engagement Score*	51.1%	70%
Age	30 and under – 16% 31/49 – 52% 50+ – 32%	
Qualification Levels	NQSW – 16% QSW 38% ESW – 31% ASW – 15%	Within 3 percentage points of target operating model for Statutory and Assessment
Grow our own talent: L6 SW Apprenticeships Step Up programme NQSW ASYE	Not available	=>75% retention at 2 years post qualification appointment

*\*Wellbeing and Positive Engagement measure is extracted from our 'All Colleague Survey', conducted annually.*





